



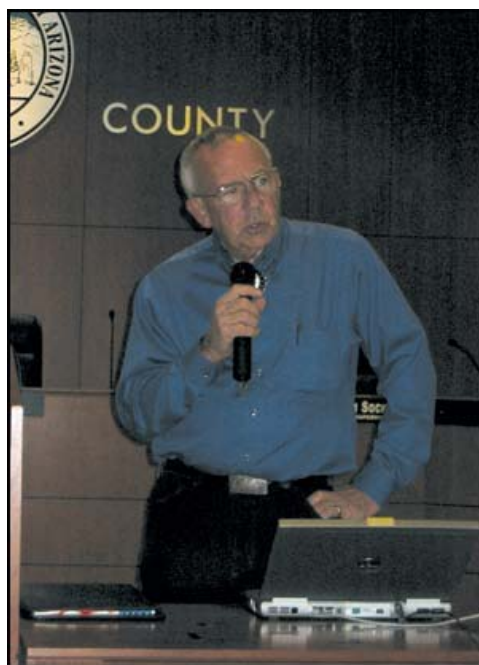
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SWAG looks at rural water issues

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Herb Guenther, director of the Arizona Department of Water Resources, was in Kingman Wednesday night to present a proposal from the Statewide Water Advisory Group. Photo: JENNIFER BARTLETT/Miner

KINGMAN - The Statewide Water Advisory Group has agreed to focus on rural Arizona water issues, Arizona Department of Water Resources Director Herb Guenther said in a presentation to Mohave County residents Wednesday night.

Guenther made the stop in Kingman as part of a statewide speaking tour this month to present a series of rural water resource proposals that have been developed by SWAG.

SWAG, a coalition of 52 representatives from all over the state, was put together by Gov. Janet Napolitano as a means for local residents to reach common ground on water needs for the communities across Arizona and ensure an adequate supply.

The purpose of this group, Guenther said, was to define rural water issues, gather input from stakeholders (cities, towns, counties, large industries, advocacy groups, legislators and the public) and to propose solutions.

Since SWAG's formation in May, Guenther said the group has been meeting every two weeks to compile a list of issues and develop a "straw proposal" for how to address these issues.

Main concerns involve the adequate water supply requirement outside of active management areas, Guenther said.

The adequate water supply idea started in 1973, he said, as a consumer advisory program.

Under this, developers wishing to build in areas outside of an AMA are required to submit a hydrology report to ADWR describing the availability

of water.

"Water must be of an adequate quantity and quality that is physically, legally and continuously available for 100 years to receive a designation of adequacy from us," Guenther said.

If the developer was unable to prove 100-year adequacy, his only requirement to build was to disclose the inadequacy to the initial buyers, Guenther said.

In other words, a designation of inadequacy was no roadblock to development.

It also created the possibility that the developer could draw the water out from under existing users or a

developer who previously proved water adequacy.

Even if a developer gained a designation of water adequacy, the concern was still raised about what could happen in 100 years.

In an effort to address these concerns, SWAG formed a "straw proposal," Guenther said. This proposal includes:

- Giving jurisdictions outside AMAs authority to require adequacy demonstration prior to development approval.
- Creating a water resources development fund from appropriations, donations and impact fees. Cities, private water companies and other providers may apply for loans or planning grants
- Allowing water resource management districts to acquire water, construct projects, wholesale water, own and operate facilities, adopt water management goals, collect fees and repay bonds/debt.
- Metering wells (could be voluntary), preparing annual reports, establishing adequacy standards, and developing permit standards for well spacing, conservation, new wells, etc.
- Establishing boundaries of water resource management districts on a hydrologic basis.
- Having the Legislature decide on the formation of new water management district. Districts could be governed by an elected board or an existing board, such as a city council.

SWAG has also determined that ADWR should still maintain some oversight, Guenther said. SWAG has suggested that ADWR establish simplified groundwater withdrawal rights within district boundaries that are consistent with the district goals. SWAG has also suggested that ADWR receive annual reports as well as a portion of the fees for administration purposes.

In addition to setting up water resource management districts, SWAG has also suggested that a water development fund should be established for projects that cannot be funded by existing sources, Guenther said. The most important thing about this statewide fund would be that it would have widespread eligibility for funds and would be a primarily revolving loan fund.

For those in attendance Wednesday night, the major concern seemed to revolve around the massive growth that developers are looking to bring in. While the ideas looked great on paper, there were some who asked if anything could be done now about developers. Others questioned whether or not the Legislature would act on the suggestions.

Currently, the law allows developers outside an AMA to build without an adequate water supply, Guenther said. This poses problems to the community because of the limited groundwater resources. Until the law was changed, however, Guenther said that there was not much that could be done.

Also, Guenther said many legislators have been very involved with SWAG and the ideas the group has put forward. Due to that involvement and growing concerns about water availability around the state, he said he did not expect any problems in not getting anywhere with the Legislature.

The most important thing about this "straw proposal," Guenther said, was to gather public input. The proposal can be found online at the ADWR Web site at www.azwater.gov. There is also a selection on the site to submit comments.

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